Let Me In

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Let Me In

by sourweather

Summary

Will and Hannibal have been together for months, now, and Will's never been happier. But when the Ripper strikes again after an extended hiatus, everything changes. Does Will really know his boyfriend? Does he want to?

Notes

ehehehe ive wanted to write this fic for YEARS and i know i wrote the first 2 parts of this series in 2021 but im back lol. the whole fic is already written but i havent decided yet if it'll update once or twice a week. i hope yall enjoy how things play out ;)

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

When Will was a kid, Summer was always his favorite season.

The freedom from school played a not-insignificant role in that, or course. Summers being a lot less brutal some thirty years ago definitely helped. Most of all, though, there was a certain laziness that seemed to come over the world. The stray dogs took to napping in the afternoons, and people would walk a little bit slower, and Will and his father would sit on the edge of the dock with their feet in cool water. The heat felt like a permission slip, signed by the universe. An excuse to sit back and rest, if only for a while.

And then he'd gotten older, and harder, and wearier. He really couldn't say whether the permissions of Summer stopped being extended, or if he just stopped letting himself take them. Either way, he quit giving in. That sun-warmed sleepiness would come creeping into the edges of him, and like a starving, bitter winter, he pressed onward.

Being with Hannibal feels a lot like Summer used to feel, lately.

"Darling?"

"Hm?"

Will doesn't open his eyes, but he can feel how Hannibal looks at him from the kitchenette. It's like a nice breeze on his face after hours stuck inside.

"I'm putting the kettle on," Hannibal says, and the sofa is so close to the stove that he doesn't even need to raise his voice. "Would you like a cup of tea?"

He wrinkles his nose, shaking his head. "You're joking, right? It's nearly ninety degrees out, Han, how can you stand to have hot tea right now?"

"I could make iced tea."

That makes Will open his eyes. He sits up a bit, still half-reclined against the armrest. Hannibal is standing near the tiny stove, looking adorably out of place in his meagre surroundings. When he'd called the cabin they'd be staying in this weekend 'cozy,' Will had underestimated him, clearly. It has indoor plumbing, though, and the bed is big enough for two, so it's decidedly more luxurious than camping.

Hannibal tilts his head, his hair soft and falling over his forehead. He hasn't fussed with his appearance once in the three days they've been here, which Will would wager is some sort of record. He's watching Will, an expectant little gleam in his eyes. Will snorts.

"You can't be trusted with sweet tea."

A lifted brow, but he knows exactly what Will means.

“You put too much sugar in it,” Will accuses. “You don’t have the touch for it.”

Hannibal hums, turning to fill a small kettle with water. They’re near a mountain spring, blessed with an abundance of water so fresh that it’s soft in the mouth. Makes Will feel guilty to spend too long in the shower, knowing he’s got something so pure running down his skin. It’s a quiet sort of extravagance, one that he feels more equipped to appreciate than Hannibal’s usual luxury.

“I hope you can forgive my woefully European sensibilities,” Hannibal says around a smile, setting the kettle on the stove top and prowling toward the sofa.

He steps through a sunbeam on his way, the golden light pouring in from the window catching him just so. It lights sparks in Hannibal’s deep eyes, glints in the lighter strands of his hair. His tanned skin seems to glow with it, just for a moment. Will parts his lips, almost asks him to stop where he’s standing. Just for another second, just so Will can savor the sight of him a little longer.

He holds his tongue, but the sentiment must be written all over his face because Hannibal’s lips curl into a playful smirk.

“What’s that look about?” he teases.

Will makes a show out of turning his head to the side, craning his neck until he’s nearly looking behind himself. “What look? I wasn’t looking at anything.”

Hannibal’s laugh floats across the room to greet him, and Will cracks a wry grin. “So you say.”

“Mm.” He risks another glance up at Hannibal, nearly sheepish under his gaze. Will shifts on the sofa, jerks his chin upward in Hannibal’s direction. “C’mere.”

Another tip of his head, but he moves to sit beside Will’s outstretched legs. Will lets one leg slip off the sofa, beckons Hannibal into the space he’s made.

When Hannibal crawls far enough over his body, Will wraps his arms around the other man and gently urges him down. Hannibal doesn’t say anything, but Will sees the joy all over his face when he rests his cheek against Will’s chest. It’s a sweet, almost shy sort of pleasure. The sight sets off a resonant ache through Will, like ringing an iron bell. Hannibal’s given him so much, in the time they’ve spent together. More than he ever expected to find. He’s become Will’s sanctuary, a warm place to hide when the rest of the world turns dark and icy. He’s gentle, loving. It’s easy between them.

What has Will offered him in return?

He frowns to himself, running his fingers through Hannibal’s hair. Too often, Will falls into the trap of seeing Hannibal as more than he is. It’s something Hannibal does on purpose, he thinks. Making himself out to be some bulletproof, impenetrable thing. Will can see, though, especially in moments like this one, that’s it’s nothing but a front. He’s just as vulnerable as

anyone else. More so, maybe, because he isn't accustomed to being wounded. It's just a trick that looks very convincing from the outside. A stage prop, hollow cardboard painted gold.

Hannibal sighs happily, burrowing closer and curling his arms around Will's body. Will's fondness bursts from him like a sprout through soil, and he moves his other hand to rub along Hannibal's spine. He opens his mouth to say *'I love you'—*

His phone rings.

Will groans when he plucks the device from the tiny, visibly handmade end table beside him. Jack.

"Starting to think our next trip should be somewhere without cell service," he mutters, scowling at the screen.

"I was told that there wouldn't be signal *here,"* Hannibal replies. "It was one of their selling points."

He huffs. "Guess you got scammed."

Will's been firm with Jack, lately. It's something that Hannibal is loudly pleased about. Once every three weeks, he takes a long weekend off. Three days and nights to himself, usually spent with Hannibal. Sometimes they stay home, just laze around and share meals and fuck. Sometimes they get out of the city. It's nice.

After being harassed throughout their trip to Buenos Aries, Will tried turning his phone off during their mini-holidays. But then Zoe ate a sock while Will was staying at Hannibal's house on the coast, and Will didn't find out out until he came home to an anxious dogsitter and a bill from the local vet. Still, Jack had learned the hard way that it was best to respect Will's space.

So then why is he calling?

"I can decline it for you, if you'd like," Hannibal offers. He's muffled where his cheek is pressed to Will's shirt.

"It might be important, Han. It could be life or death."

"Everything is life or death to Jack," He mumbles, but he makes no move to stop Will from taking the call.

"Five minutes," Will assures him as he brings it to his ear, and Hannibal shuts his eyes.

"Five minutes, certainly."

Will smiles down at him, still petting his soft hair. "I'm not available right now, Jack," he says into the phone. "You know the rules."

He's used to Jack being stern, but the intensity in his voice still manages to startle him. "You're gonna want to make yourself available."

This again. “I’ve told you before, I can’t—”

“It’s the Ripper.”

Will freezes. “...You’re sure?”

Hannibal shifts, digging his chin into Will’s torso and frowning up at him. He’s on alert, now. He’s sensed the change in the air.

“I’m almost sure,” Jack says. “I need you to take me the rest of the way.”

Will shuts his eyes, pinches the bridge of his nose. “Yeah.” He’s already dreading the look on Hannibal’s face when he has to break it to him. “Yeah, that’s… definitely something I can make myself available for.”

The frown on Hannibal’s face deepens, and when Will catches his eye he just offers an apologetic shrug. Just then, the kettle starts whistling on the stove. Hannibal pulls himself away from the sofa with a grunt, leaving Will blanketed in the warmth his body left behind. His ghost sticks to Will’s skin, it’s more pleasant than it should be.

“I’m gonna send you the location. I’ll comp your ticket, just— wherever you are, get down here as fast as you can, okay? I’m not letting him go cold again.”

Will nods, an unseen gesture of camaraderie. He still can’t seem to wrap his head around the last sounder. It’s not like the Ripper to deviate from patterns, at least not the ones he sets himself. And yet the last time he decided to surface, he’d stopped early. Two bodies, and then he’d left the FBI waiting for the third to drop like circling buzzards.

It was proof of his burnout, that Will was so ready to just drop it at the time. Hell, maybe the Ripper was tired— Will was fucking tired, too. But he’s been turning it around more in his head, lately. When it’s late and he can’t sleep, he lies beside Hannibal and thinks about it for hours on end. Why just *stop?* What could it mean?

He knows that Hannibal likely wouldn’t appreciate him solving crimes in the other man’s bed, but that’s the price of loving Will Graham. He can treat the symptoms of Will’s work all he likes— take him on holidays, and cook him gourmet meals, and massage his aching muscles. And Will can make it clear that he appreciates those things, because he does. But at the end of the day, it doesn’t change the thing that lives underneath. Will wishes it would, sometimes. Imagines the man he could be, if he could only pull himself away from the shadows and step fully into the light. He’d be better for it. Happier.

That is, he likes to imagine he’d be happier.

But as he ends the phone call, there isn’t a moment of hesitation. He’s booking a plane ticket before Hannibal can so much as say ‘Is everything alright?’ He can’t help it, it’s who he is.

“It doesn’t make any sense,” he mutters, hunched over his phone. There’s a flight out in the morning, it’s expensive but he doubts Jack gives a shit.

“Will?”

Why drop off so suddenly? Where does that leave them? Is this the third body of the last sounder, or the first in a new one? How much time does he have before the Ripper slips away again?

He nearly jumps out of his skin when a sudden weight falls over his shoulders. Hannibal's hands, grounding him in place. It makes him gasp, his breaths coming quickly.

"Talk to me, darling."

"I have to go," Will says. He twists, looking up at Hannibal over his shoulder. "I'm sorry, you know I wouldn't do it if I didn't have to—"

"You *don't* have to," Hannibal interrupts. He's weary, Will can feel it all over. It's in the tension of his hands, struggling against an urge to hold him down.

Hannibal might not spend as much time begging Will to quit consulting as he used to, but he doesn't make his opinions on Will's work a secret. Will can't really fault him for it. He knows better than anyone that the process of crawling into a killer's mind is damaging, that Will comes out of the shadows haggard and afraid. That Will has a bad habit of swallowing as much of it as he can stomach before he allows himself to stop. And he brings things back with him, more often than not. A darkness that clings to him like cobwebs and weighs him down like a great waterlogged coat.

Hannibal's hands begin to move with gentle pressure, kneading the muscles of Will's shoulders. Will wants, badly, to sink into it. To shut his eyes, tip his head back, and let Hannibal smooth away every sharp, jagged edge of him. He doesn't.

"You aren't an island, Will," Hannibal whispers, his voice a siren's call. "For all your brilliance, you do not stand alone against the evils of the world. There are others who can stand in your place."

"It's the Ripper," he blurts, in much the same way Jack had.

Hannibal freezes. Immediately, Will tastes rage in the air. Disgust, disdain. All of it in generous helpings. "The Ripper is on hiatus," Hannibal says, each word like taps from an ice pick.

"Well, Jack seems to think his vacation has come to an end." Will stands, brushing the hair from his face as he takes stock of the cabin. Puzzling out where to start packing.

"You'll forgive me if I'm hesitant to put much stock into what Jack Crawford thinks."

Will sighs. He rounds the couch, coming to stand before Hannibal. He takes both of the other man's hands in his own, runs the pad of his thumb over Hannibal's suntanned skin.

"You're upset," he says softly. His eyes are fixed on their hands, on how well they fit together. "I understand that."

Hannibal doesn't soften. "I'm more frustrated than anything else."

Will pulls at Hannibal's hands, tugs him closer. Helpless, he goes. The kiss Will initiates does the job of smoothing his creases, at least somewhat. He's still angry underneath, but his surface turns placid.

"I'm sorry," Will breathes, hot against his jaw before pressing another soft line of kisses there. "I'll make it up to you, really."

He knows he's won the battle when Hannibal sighs, tipping his head back to give Will better access to his permanently marked throat. The war is still undecided.

"It's the killer dragging you away from me who owes me an apology," Hannibal mutters. Will smiles around a loose kiss. He's cute when he's pouty.

"You're directing your anger at the Ripper?" Will prods with a chuckle. "Not Jack for once?"

Hannibal huffs. He sounds almost bitter when he says "I'm directing it at the *killer,* yes. Whether it's the Ripper remains to be seen."

"Ah, I see." Will pulls away, kisses Hannibal's knuckles. "So if it isn't the Ripper, then you'll turn your gaze Jack's way?"

"With brutal intent, I assure you," Hannibal purrs. Not quite appeased, but getting there. "Would you like me to help you gather your things?"

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

> I've decided that I'm gonna try to update this on Sundays and Thursdays! I hope y'all like this section- i was really excited to write this case <3

Will is exhausted, when he first steps into the grandeur of the theatre. He'd barely slept the night before— and not for lack of trying— then hopped onto a plane before dawn had even broken. Jack offered to pick him up from the airport, which Will had naively misinterpreted as a consolation for cutting his getaway short. As it turned out, it was more an opportunity to thoroughly brief him before they arrived.

"Kurt Abercrombie. Thirty-four, Caucasian, married but no kids. He was an officer with the local homicide division."

"A cop," Will muttered, flipping through the small packet in his hands. It'd been waiting in his seat, when Jack pulled up. Well, he's certainly thorough.

"Maybe he got too close," Jack offered. His hands wouldn't stop flexing, kneading at the steering wheel like a stressed cat. Will sighed through his nose.

"Maybe," he conceded. "Hard for me to say until I see the body."

And here it is.

A morbid symphony echos about the space, its high ceilings sending even the softest conversation ringing in every direction. It's enough to make Will's jaw turn tight, his hands balling into fists as he advances. The tap of his boot soles meeting marble feels impossibly loud among the chatter and camera flashes, and he's struck with a childish urge to take his boots off and pad about the lobby.

The crowd parts, just so, and Will sees it. Revealed from its center outward, like a grotesque eye falling open.

The body is sitting at the top of a grand staircase, its back against the pane of a large, ornate window. At night, this feature would give theatre guests enjoying their intermission a sublime view of the starry sky. Now, at just after seven-thirty in the morning, the Summer sun shoots through Will's head like a gunshot, making him wince and shield his eyes.

"You'd think they could invest in some curtains," Will grits.

"There usually is one," Jack replies, eyes unflinchingly ahead. How must it feel, to be bereft of constant headache? Is it blissful? "Ripper tore it down."

“Let there be light,” he mutters, and makes for the stairs. “Nowhere to run, nowhere to hide?”

It’s the shimmer that he notices first. The striking, not-quite-sparkle of some fine, reflective thing.

“Ripper’s into pearls this season,” Zeller notes when Will approaches, gesturing to the body with a gloved hand.

“Somebody call *Vogue,”* Price quips in return.

Will crouches in front of the body, frowning hard against the glare. The victim’s torso has been opened with a long, vertical slice, his abdominal cavity filled almost to bursting with what must be hundreds of pearls. They spill from him, dotting the surrounding floor like the contents of a cartoon treasure chest.

“They’re plastic,” Zeller says, handing a pair of gloves to Will as he speaks. “Very nice plastic, but plastic. Which is a shame, if you ask me, because the headline ‘Million Dollar Body’ would’ve flown off the shelves.”

“ ‘Billion Dollar Body’ rolls off the tongue better,” Price argues.

“No, like— you’ve never seen *Million Dollar Baby?”*

“Has to mean something…” Will mumbles, plucking one of the faux pearls from the plush carpet and holding it to the light.

Zeller shrugs. “Means he didn’t feel like hashing out however many thousand dollars it would’ve cost to do this with real ones.”

“Hundreds of thousands,” Price corrects. “He made extra space in there. Lungs, heart, liver. Usual trophy-nabbing, but it meant he had to stuff even more in him.”

Will peers up at them over his glasses, eyes narrowed against the light. “Have you ever known the Chesapeake Ripper to be frugal?”

“So you do think it’s the Ripper.”

He flinches slightly. He hadn’t heard Jack approach. “I’m not saying anything definite yet,” he says.

“Well, if it’s not the Ripper, then it’s someone who did their homework.”

“It’s hitting more marks then the false positives usually do,” Will admits. They’ve been finding plenty of might-be’s since Jacks white whale fell off the grid. He wasn’t expecting this one to be quite so convincing. “Can I have the room?”

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“He’s alive, when I open him up. He doesn’t know why he’s here, and he never will.”

My lip curls as I observe the creature writhing beneath me. His agony is a muted thing— I've sedated him while I work— but I know that he would scream if afforded the opportunity. It's satisfying. Deserved.

I'm methodical in my preparations. Passion won't move me to make mistakes, not with a piece as important as this one. It's imperative, more so than ever, that I get this exactly right. When I do finally bring a blade to his chest, carving a space for myself in one uninterrupted incision, it is with a steady hand and a furrowed brow.

"He doesn't need to know. It's not important to me that he understands. It's what he *represents* that matters."

Once I've taken something for myself, I start filling him up. They're costume pearls. A cheap imitation, just a pile of ugly, worthless diversions. "Pearls before swine."

Stupid, filthy beasts. The treasure they've been seeking is being held under their noses, and what do they do? "They're all too blind to see it, aren't they? But you'll see. I'll hold him to the light, you won't be able to miss it."

I take his eyes next. The gems that I slip beneath his lids are smaller than the socket's previous inhabitants, but much more valuable.

"...Open your eyes, Agent Graham."

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Will reaches out, gloved fingers shaking slightly even as he knows with absolute certainty what he'll find. Carefully, he pries the victim's eyelid's apart, forcibly opening it to the harsh light of day.

'He knew it would be me', he thinks, pulling the small gem from the sticky, foul viscera that surrounds it. It's certainly intentional that The Ripper didn't clean the wounds. *'It always had to be me.'*

He holds the pearl to the light. It looks different from the ones filling Kurt Abercrombie's abdomen. Less uniform in its shape, a less perfect shade of champagne.

"Anybody know how to tell the difference between a real pearl and a fake one?" he calls out into the theatre.

"I've heard that rubbing it on your teeth works."

Beverly's voice is closer behind him than he'd been expecting. He glances up at her over his shoulder and she smirks. "Wouldn't recommend it in this case, though."

Will breathes out a dry laugh. "I think I'll pass."

"You think that one's real?"

“It’s definitely different from the others.” He plucks its twin from the other socket, holding them aloft in each hand. “The killer fed the police so much cheap crap that Abercrombie burst, but someone caught a glimpse of something genuine, even if they were too… porcine, to notice it.”

“Pigs,” Jack huffs. “Never heard *that* one before.”

Will stands with a groan, rolling the two pearls over his palm as he takes a few steps back.

“So what are we thinking? Cop sees something he wasn’t supposed to see, Ripper gives him the oyster treatment as punishment?”

He shakes his head slowly, swallowing around a sour taste. “No, that’s not it. I think it’s…” Will trails off. The words *‘I think it’s a message’* are there, sitting in his mouth like bullets, but he can’t seem to pull the trigger. He sighs. “I think it’s the opposite. There’s a frustration here, an insult. This is about something Abercrombie *didn’t* see.”

‘Something that I didn’t see.’

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

> im gonna maybe caution for some body horror in this sequence, maybe? just because writing it definitely made me a little bit squirmy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I stand, alone, on a beach. The sky is dark, its ashen clouds carrying the weighty promise of an oncoming storm. I look out at the water, seeing nothing but choppy waves in the distance in every direction. I can't explain why, but as I stand there, I can't imagine a sight more inviting than that unforgiving sea.

With easy strides, my feet whispering over sun-warmed sand, I step into the ocean. The first wave nearly takes me under, and before I know it I'm up to my chest in cool water. There's something soothing about it, even as a lightning strike bursts and crackles what seems like mere feet away from me. I left myself sink into it, tossing my hair back when I resurface.

A soft glimmer in the dim light catches my attention, some stray beam of sunlight through the clouds catching my skin. When I look down at my hands, my palms are caked with off-white growths. Barnacles, my subconscious mind supplies, embedded in my skin like the hull of an old, weather-worn ship. Frantic, I move to pull the barnacles out, struggling to pry them away with my fingertips. They're clumsy, at first. Made numb by water that turns colder every second. I think to myself 'How long have I been here?' How did I fail to notice the barnacles until now?

At last, I manage to form a grip around the foreign object, yank it from the heel of my palm. It's agonizing. I howl in pain, the sea around me turns red with blood, I'm crying. There are still dozens of barnacles to extract and I don't know if I have the strength to dig them all out.

Shaking, I hold my findings up to the sky, staring at it through the haze of my tears. I realize all at once that it was never a barnacle. Clutched between my fingers is a pearl, still stained with the watery traces of my blood.

Another roll of thunder echoes all around me, and in the rumble I can make out a voice. I feel my muscles tense in fear as it says—

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"Will? Wake up darling, you're having a nightmare."

The first thing that Will notices, after bursting from the cocoon of his nightmare and shooting to a seating position, is the heat. The air is so thick with it that it sticks to the back of his

throat, his chest heaving as he gulps in great gasps of it. There's sweat beading on the backs of his knees, the damp fabric of his T-shirt is clinging to his spine.

Hannibal rests a soothing hand on Will's shoulder, but doesn't draw nearer. It's deeply appreciated, Will imagines he'd burst into flames if he were pulled into an embrace.

"Are you alright?" Hannibal asks, and Will nods. He scratches at his now unmarred palm, the rush of ocean waves still roaring in his ears.

His voice is rough with sleep and cracked with anxiety when he croaks "Could you crack a window for me? 's like a sauna in here."

"Of course." Hannibal darts near enough to peck a quick kiss to Will's wet temple, and then he's standing with a soft grunt from Will's bed. "I'll fetch you some water, too."

"Thanks, you're a saint."

Hannibal makes a sound that isn't quite a laugh, and Will watches him move through the darkened space with a sudden wave of fondness. He loves Hannibal most just after waking, when he's still soft and unguarded. Will imagines he's the only person alive who's seen him like this, and it's a privilege he doesn't take lightly.

"Would you like to talk about the nightmare?" Hannibal prods. His tone is light but Will is too familiar with the other man's curiosity to fall for faux nonchalance.

He sighs, stretches his weary limbs. "An exercise in self-mutilation," he supplies, rubbing his palms together restlessly. The feeling of pearls in his skin won't leave, it makes him shudder.

"I see." The window near the bed protests slightly when Hannibal pushes it open, though Will can't say for certain whether the resulting groan comes from the window or the man opening it. The air that comes in from outside isn't any cooler than the air inside, in the end, but Will is grateful for it nonetheless. At least the air isn't so still, this way. Makes the space feel less stifling.

Will thanks Hannibal again when he brings him a tall glass of iced water. Always glass. Plastic feels like it never gets clean, and metal lends an awful taste to whatever its holding. "Sorry for waking you."

"I would rather be low on sleep than leave you alone, you know that."

He does. It still worries him, from time to time. "Maybe you should just stay at your place for the next couple weeks, all the same," he says, though it's the furthest thing from what he actually wants. What he *actually* wants is to crash into Hannibal like a shipwreck, to let Hannibal seep between the broken boards of him and fill him up until he sinks.

Hannibal doesn't even need to refuse the suggestion for Will to know he's not going to take it. "You're anticipating an uptick in nightmares?"

Will shrugs, helpless. Almost bashful, he says "What can I say, he's always had a way of getting in my head."

“The Chesapeake Ripper.”

Hannibal says the name with an overwhelming disdain, his lip curling in a sneer that shows his teeth. Will’s chest turns tight in response. He’s never seen Hannibal the way he’s been since Will started this case. In a word, he’s furious. He’s incandescent with it, anger burning so hot that Will can nearly see the air shimmer around his figure, like the distortion over Southern asphalt. It’s frightening, but Will can’t help but find it sweet, at the same time. All Hannibal has ever wanted for Will was for him to feel safe and secure, of course he’s angry with the Ripper for threatening that safety.

“Hey,” Will says, reaching for him as Hannibal settles into bed once more. His fingers thread into the other man’s hair, carding through mussed strands with a fond smile. “I’m gonna be okay, yeah? I won’t get sucked in this time, I promise.”

Hannibal leans into the affection, but it’s clear that he’s not convinced. “You said that the Ripper was trying to tell you something,” he replies. “I know you well enough to know that you won’t rest until you understand his message.”

Will narrows his eyes. There’s something there, beneath protective fury and loving concern. An extra spark, something sour. Will chuckles.

“Han, don’t tell me you’re jealous.”

“Of the Chesapeake Ripper?” Hannibal asks, and Will can’t help but notice how he keeps saying the name, re-clarifying. “Of course not, don’t be ridiculous.”

Will pets his hair again, leaning closer with a smile. “Good. Because I’d much rather be having dreams about you every night.”

That seems to soothe some of the burn. Hannibal smiles back, one of his hands finding its way to rest on Will’s thigh. “Is that so?” he prods, mischief shining in his eyes.

And just that easily, the crawling feeling melts away, at least for the moment. The odd itch on his palms doesn’t dissipate, but he feels like he can breathe again.

Grinning, he darts close and kisses the corner of Hannibal’s mouth. “Yes. I prefer you to a serial killer. A tremendous honor, I know.”

Hannibal hums, a measure of his usual smugness taking over as he catches Will in another kiss. Slower, this time. The hand on his thigh squeezes, drifts.

Well, that’s one way to take his mind off of death.

His breath is hot against Will’s jaw, the low whisper of his voice sends a shudder down Will’s spine. “And what would you want this dream to be about, mylimasis?”

Will just lets out a breathy, hitching laugh. When Hannibal’s fingers slip beneath his waistband, Will doesn’t stop him.

Chapter End Notes

han's being really normal about the whole ripper thing :)

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It's about ten days later when the next body drops. A quick turnaround, even for the Ripper, and Jack pounces on it with a clutching sort of desperation.

This time, Will finds himself driving out to a spot he actually knows. It's in a forest, not far from a stream he frequents for early morning fishing trips. Will's palms sweat against his steering wheel as he winds along back roads to get there. He tries to avoid making too many assumptions before he can arrive and properly digest the evidence, but he can't shake the feeling that this choice is deliberate. Targeted.

Will grimaces, running his hands over the wheel's material and trying to scrub away the feeling of pearls embedded in his flesh.

That first night wasn't the only time he dreamed about ripping pearls from his skin. If anything, they seemed to be spreading. In recent nightmares, he'd felt them nestled in the meat of his chest, clinging to his thighs, even invading his face like blackheads. Every time, he's frantic and disgusted. Every time, he rips one out. Every time, the pain of trying to remove it when it's buried so deep is so excruciating that he can't bear to continue.

It never fails to leave him sickened and unnerved when he wakes, but luckily he hasn't had to deal with it on his own. Hannibal has been even more attentive than usual, lately, and it isn't hard to guess why. Ever since the Chesapeake Ripper walked back into Will's life, Hannibal's been like a guard dog for his sanity. Shutting out the shadows and filling his home with an almost blinding light. He finds that he prefers squinting into the sun to peering into darkness.

Jack stops him when he arrives at the scene, a characteristically grave expression on his face. "Listen," he says, holding up his hands like he's worried he'll have to hold Will back. "I just want to warn you, before you go over there—"

"Don't worry, I'm not squeamish," Will deadpans. Jack doesn't smile. "Come on. After everything I've seen, you think this one's gonna make me shy away? How bad is it?"

His mouth works before he replies, rolling the words around before presenting them. "I can't explain it," Jack sighs at last. "There's an… an energy, around this one. Something in the air. Gave me chills." He shudders, as if demonstrating, then fixes Will with a hard look. "It's *bad,* Will. And if I can feel it, then what's it gonna do to you?"

Will makes a show out of shrugging, acting unbothered as if it really makes a difference. Still, there's a weight to Jack's warning that makes it difficult to shake. "They're all bad," he mutters, and starts for the treeline.

But as he approaches the body, following the sound of crime scene analysts bustling about more so than the path, he can feel it begin to manifest. A crushing, clawing weight bearing

down on him, like a great lion pinning him to the earth. It tastes like blood in his mouth, crawls over his nerves and sets its teeth to them.

The others can feel it, too, at least in small amounts. There's a stilted, tense air surrounding the crew as they work, something that Will hasn't seen in even the most gruesome circumstances. Ordinarily he'd be grateful for the lack of noise, but the silence that blooms here comes packaged with a distinct *wrongness* that has Will begging for someone to say something, anything, to break it.

By all metrics, the corpse itself should underwhelm. Will's no rookie, and he's seen much, much worse. It's almost neat, in its presentation. A precise, measured sort of cruelty. Organs and limbs, arranged near the river in clean little piles. Like laundry waiting to be stowed away. The skin is nowhere to be seen, the crimson truth of the victim's body left to breathe. The tissue seems to glisten in the sun, like fragments of mica on the silty river floor.

It feels tremendously at odds with the vicious aura all around them. The venom still hangs, bitter and acerbic in the forest air. The Ripper was *furious* when he made this, brought to a wrath of biblical proportions so fervent that it bubbled and cracked beneath his skin. The anger as it's been displayed runs cold, though, and Will shudders to imagine where all that passion and fury has been redirected.

His prayers for sound are answered in the form of a whisper on his left. "You okay?" it asks, and Will jumps.

Beverly laughs. It feels forced, somehow. Thin. "Guess that answers my question," she quips.

"I'm fine," Will breathes after a moment, reaching up to adjust his glasses. He crouches near the pile, and Beverly barely catches him before he can touch the victim's skinned face. She passes him a fresh pair of gloves, a patient look on her face as he mutters his thanks and pulls them on.

"Looks like he's on a war path."

Will sighs, staring at the empty sockets where eyes once were. No pearls, this time. *'Something else I'm not seeing, now? Open your eyes, Agent Graham.'* "The Ripper's got feelings, just like anybody else," he muses dryly. "Just as prone as any of us to pain, rage."

"How about jealousy?" she offers. "Hell hath no fury like a killer scorned."

His mouth turns sour as he mulls it over. The only other time he'd seen the Ripper worked into a lather that even came close to this one was when Gideon was playing Copycat. "Maybe the oyster we found at the theatre wasn't the Chesapeake Ripper after all…"

Of course the Ripper would be livid, if even Will fell for a pretender. Another swine sniffing at pearls, even with the truth is right before his eyes— *'Open your eyes, Will!'* Could he have been that wrong? He'd initially approached the Abercrombie case with so much skepticism, but when he saw the pearls behind his eyes, he'd felt so *sure.* Maybe he's losing his edge, all of the downtime spent being pampered by Hannibal dulling his senses until he's blind to what he'd normally have spotted in an instant.

Will sighs, tries to shake off the sudden uncertainty making a home in the base of his skull. He takes a deep breath, shuts his eyes.

-

It takes a practiced hand to skin someone without damaging the tissue beneath. Not just strength and precision but patience, and of course, the right tools for the job. This is as much a demonstration of my skills as it is anything else.

“They must have forgotten who it is they’re reckoning with, if they were swayed by a bit of showmanship and some tricks of the light.”

An awful stab of cold anger pierces me, and I scowl at my gloved hands. They tremble. I steady them.

“...If *he* was swayed.”

The idea that *he* could mistake anyone else for me has overtaken me. I fixate on it, night and day. I might’ve been content to hibernate forever, left the FBI looking ever over their shoulders while I let the Ripper mantle go untouched. My pride won’t let this lie, though. Not when it comes to *him.*

The pendulum swings, and I am standing near a river. Pretty, tranquil. This piece is all about restraint. Ire, and restraint. I display my disassembly in a way that horrifies without my typical grandiosity. “Not everything that glitters is gold.”

I place my thumb where the pig’s lower lip had once been. Gently, almost sensual, I open his mouth.

“You’re being fed a feast of lies, darling. Tell me, will you swallow it?”

“Will?”

-

The call of his name is so soft that it’s nearly inaudible, but it makes him flinch all the same. Beverly winces.

“Sorry,” she says, shifting a bit on her feet. “It’s just… you’re shaking. Are you sure you’re okay? I know it’s been a while since your last meltdown, but…”

Her words pass over him like waves over sand. If the individual grains of him are disturbed, it does nothing to alter the shore.

Holding his breath, Will reaches for what remains of the victim’s face. Distantly, he notes that Bev is right. His hands shake uncontrollably before his eyes. Gloved fingertips nudge the victim’s teeth, slip past them. Something in the cavern of his skull urges him to pull back. To leave it be, to stop and shut his eyes. It’s a scab best left unpicked, it urges. Prying it open will earn you nothing but bloody nails and a wound no closer to healing. The dead flesh of

the corpse's tongue is soft, forgiving. Will feels tears beading in his eyes, the aura of his killer too much for his psyche to bear.

He almost knocks it down the hole where the victim's throat would've been, clumsy fingers jabbing at his mouth like pool cues. Will knows what it is the moment he traps it in his clutch, and something sour and sickly threatens to rise from his gut. Slowly, almost regretfully, he pulls the digits free.

There, grasped between his index and middle finger, is a pearl. Visibly artificial in its shine, its shape. The message it carries couldn't be more clear. It's the same message the false Ripper had been trying, desperately, to convey. It's obvious, now. Maybe it always has been. Will's just been begging, *begging* not to see it.

Open your eyes.

The plastic pearl slips from his hands, falling soundlessly to the forest floor. The world shifts underfoot as Will shoots upward, his brain spinning wildly. He feels childlike, suddenly. The world is a strange, frightening place and his body won't obey him. He sways, stumbles.

"Woah, Will!"

It's the pricking of a thousand tiny needles when Bev lays hands on him, steadying him before he can collapse in the dirt. His knees give out, his breaths turn to gasps that claw at his throat on their way out.

Every moment.

Every night curled up in his arms, every lingering good morning kiss, every breakfast, lunch and dinner. Every single word he's ever said. The whispering assurances that Will wasn't broken beyond repair, that he could still be valued and desired and *loved.*

It all rises up in the form of bile in his throat. Will vomits in front of the body, like the laying of some grotesque offering at Hannibal's altar. Bev is still touching him, God, how many times had he let Hannibal *touch* him?

"Hey, hey, easy," she says, hauling him back. He's contaminating the crime scene, he thinks distantly, she's doing damage control. "Come on, let me take you home."

Home? What home? The one with Hannibal's pajamas, and his toothbrush, and his scent all over everything?

He shakes his head. Tries to, anyway— it makes everything swirl so wildly that he nearly blacks out. He pushes the word "No" through his teeth, but it sounds faint. Frail.

She ignores him. Drags him another lurching step away from the body. There's a slight commotion forming, now. Mutterings in every direction that blur with the sound of the nearby river and create a unified, deafening roar. The shape of Jack Crawford rises from the smears of color, a frown that Will is too dazed to read carved into his face.

"What happened?"

“What do you think?” she snaps. “Will? Hey, Will? Look at me.”

The sight of Beverly’s face pulses with the rising throbs behind his temples. Shimmering spots flood his vision, his head feels like it’s about to burst. His flesh burns with the afterimage of countless caresses, the once assuring weight that they brought turning against him in one fell swoop. He grits his teeth against a popping behind his eyes, like something deep in his mind just split in two.

“Stay with me, okay? Here, let’s…”

He doesn’t catch the tail end of it. Bev’s voice is drowned out by a high-pitched ringing, like the lingering ghost of a nearby gunshot. The world seems to roll from beneath him, and all at once everything goes glaringly white.

Chapter End Notes

hes fine hes just napping :)

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

> chapters for this should stay on schedule since it was all written in advance but uhhh idk how much yall will hear from me in the near future because. im kind of going through a lot rn. so. thanks for all the support and im sorry for being kind of a mess lately.

He catches flashes, between collapsing at the crime scene and falling asleep at the hospital. He's fairly certain that Jack hauls him into Bev's car, lifting him like a sack of potatoes and sending her speeding into the city. There's a blurry, swimming memory of Beverly snapping at an intake nurse, then apologizing for snapping at her a moment later. Someone asks him questions, he's too out of it to process them properly, Bev answers for him. She doesn't know his birthday. She's upset that she doesn't know his birthday.

Eventually he gets put in a room, where someone tells him that they're giving him something to 'calm him down'. He has the dream about the pearls again, but this time he doesn't stop after the first extraction. The water fills with so much blood that it turns thick like syrup. Will's voice becomes raw from screaming in agony as he purges the infestation from his hands, his chest, his face. There's a large one on his throat that makes it hard to breathe, and he's reaching for that one when he finally rises to once more join the land of the living.

Will can think of few environments less comforting than the interior of a hospital room. The lights are low, which the pounding of his head is grateful for. The rhythmic beeping of the machines surrounding him are less appreciated. Still, whatever they're drugging him with is doing its job. He's definitely fucking calm.

"You're awake."

Well. It was nice while it lasted. "Go away," he mutters. He sounds groggy, in addition to miserable. He sounds how he feels.

A beat of silence. He doesn't try to read Hannibal's face. Will can't look at him. "It's me, darling," he says, and there's an uncertainty laced through his voice that makes Will sick. As if he can't possibly imagine what's happened, why Will might want to be alone.

Hannibal reaches for him, and Will flinches away as much as he can in his current state.

"I said," he forces through grit teeth. "Get the fuck out of here. Now."

The melody of monitors shifts a bit, levels climbing with Will's anger, his disgust. The presence at his side doesn't retreat.

“Beverly called me,” Hannibal explains, outright ignoring how Will is nearly trembling with fury. “She said that you had a nervous breakdown at a crime scene.”

He tries to swallow his anger with her. She didn’t know, after all. Couldn’t have known. His eyes fall shut, begging his body to just slip below consciousness again.

Will tries to rear back with a snarl when Hannibal’s fingers move for his sweat-damp temple, interrupted en route to brush back his curls. The vertigo stops it from being too intimidating a display. He feels like a rabid dog in its death throes, lying here. Foaming with fury and inclined to bite everything that draws near, but too sick with grief to be anything but pathetic.

“Talk to me, darling—“

“Don’t,” he says, finally seizing enough strength to sound forceful. “Don’t call me that, don’t play fucking dumb, just *don’t.”*

Will hears Hannibal’s breath catch. He shifts in his seat. Not bending to Will’s request for solitude, but leaning back enough for Will to breathe.

He seems to mull over his response for a long while. It’s hard for Will to tell, the sedatives are making time feel blurry. Then again, even a few seconds would be a monumental hesitation for Hannibal.

Will’s empathy fills in the gaps, though. He’d picked up plenty at the crime scene, he knows every warring feeling going through the Ripper’s— through *Hannibal’s* head right now.

For all his apparent surprise, this is what he’d wanted to happen. He’d been on an indefinite break from acting as the Ripper, though Will doubts he ever stopped killing. And then that damned pretender showed up, and Will had swallowed his bait hook, line and sinker.

Realistically, it benefited him. It would have made his life easier, to simply let Will and Jack and all the FBI carry on chasing an impostor. The pretender would slip up eventually, they always do. And then ‘the Chesapeake Ripper’ would be a closed case, and he could go on slaughtering people behind Will’s back for the rest of their natural born lives.

But Hannibal’s always been a slave to his ego. A pig, stealing his name and fooling the FBI? Fooling *Will?* Of course it drove him mad. Will imagines he didn’t sleep for days after, stewing in a rage of apocalyptic proportions.

He’d done something impulsive.

Hannibal had to have known how it would play out, showing himself to Will. He had to know that it would ruin everything he’d spent tireless months manufacturing. It didn’t matter. He’d sooner burn both their lives to the ground than let Will believe that *anyone else* was responsible for his crimes.

Hannibal’s voice is all business when he finally replies, which feels incredibly targeted because he knows that Will *hates* the Doctor Lecter Voice. “I think this might be a conversation best continued at a later date,” he says, tense, like he’s trying to talk a bomb

down from detonating. “In private. But I’m not comfortable with leaving you alone in this condition.”

It strangles a hollow laugh from him. “There’s not going to *be* a conversation,” he corrects. He dares to open his eyes, just a sliver, staring at the featureless ceiling and willing away the hot tears threatening to slip down the side of his face. “I don’t want to hear what you have to say, I really don’t.”

Will’s sweating palms begin to shake. It’s a bit like being restrained, this feeling. Held prisoner in the straitjacket of his own skeleton. He’s never been so angry in all his life, he’s half-blind with it. If it were up to him, he’d have his hands around Hannibal’s wind pipe right now, crushing the life out of him while spitting and swearing in his face. He’d be hitting Hannibal until his own fingers started breaking, screaming until his throat bled. His heart pounds with wasted adrenaline, begging for its host to leap from the bed and tackle Hannibal to the floor, strangle him with his own IV line.

He doesn’t even try to sit up. The sedatives have him held down, his breakdown has left him too exhausted and weak to even *articulate* his wrath, let alone act on it.

Will doesn’t trust himself to hear Hannibal’s appeal. As great as his pain is, as much as he wants to curl into a ball and beg for it to go away, he’s not confident that he wouldn’t fold. If Hannibal’s gotten this far— if he’s manipulated Will, and lied to him, and wormed his way into his heart— who’s to say what else he could do, given the chance?

In the end, it looks like the Ripper got Will how he always wanted him: Helpless.

The tears fall, trickling their way into Will’s ears. The sensation makes his neck tic, he feels like a child as he reaches up and scrubs roughly at them. His breathing falters, the staccato beep of a monitor mocking him from his bedside.

Memories of the past rise up to face him, distorted like carnival mirrors. There’s something gruesome about how obvious it is, in hindsight. Why Hannibal would want Will to bring his guard down, turn against Jack, quit his job. He should have known that it was never about his own happiness. The Ripper wanted him toothless.

It feels like he’s tipping into a spiral. The lights are getting brighter by the second, the coarse fabric of his hospital gown is drowning out the climbing of his pulse. Instinctively, he recalls the mantra he’s meant to repeat in moments like these—

His spit turns sour. No, he was never in control.

“Just… tell me one thing,” he croaks.

“Anything.”

He coughs, clears the teary blockage from his throat to the best of his ability. Even as he forces out the words, there’s a not-so silent part of him saying that it won’t make any difference how Hannibal replies.

“...Was any of it real?”

Hannibal grips the edge of Will’s blanket like he’s lost balance, like his question is the equivalent of pushing him from a high roof. Will does not try to save him. “Of course, Will,” he rushes to say. He’s adopting the demeanor of the drowning, now. It doesn’t satisfy. “Every part.”

It rings hollow. Will knew that it would, deep down. Feeling it for himself is still a painful thing. “I don’t believe you,” he whispers.

Unable to resist, Hannibal reaches for him once more. Will allows him this, if only for a moment. He takes Will’s hand in his own, clutches it so tightly that it makes Will suck in a sharp breath through his teeth. “Darling—“

And then like Peter denying Christ, he pulls away once more. “Go, Hannibal.” He shifts as much as he can, searching for some measure of comfort. “Don’t call me, don’t visit. Just… go.”

He’s shocked and hurt in equal parts by the bitter laugh that Hannibal wheezes out. “You refuse to believe that I could care for you, and yet you expect me to obey you when you ask me to keep my distance. Why?”

Will sighs, shrugs. His limbs are turning heavy again, he’s never been so tired. “Because I’m asking you to?” he supplies.

“You asked me to love you, as well. In so many words.”

“Is that a threat?” Will prods, slurring a bit with oncoming slumber. “Should I change my locks?”

Rustling fabric. Will can sense movement at his side. Hannibal standing from his chair, rummaging in his pocket. With no shortage of difficulty, Will forces himself to lay eyes on the other man. As he does, he finds himself praying. Begging the powers that be to place some horrific monster from his childhood nightmares at the foot of his hospital bed, for Will to be disgusted and unnerved by what he sees.

There, standing at his side, is Hannibal. Doctor Lecter, the Chesapeake Ripper. Han. He looks tired. It’s visible, how stressed he’s been today. Unbidden, Will imagines how he must’ve looked when he got the call from Bev. He doesn’t doubt that Hannibal dropped whatever he’d been doing at the time, rushed straight here, grilled the doctors and Bev for every spec of information he could.

The lighting is… less than flattering. Too cold, too sterile. Even still, the sight of him fails to make Will recoil. He looks human, standing here. Weary and wounded and *sad.* It’s enough to make Will wish he hadn’t looked, that he’d let Hannibal Lecter step out of his life without so much as a goodbye passed between them.

Hannibal produces his key ring from his coat pocket. Carefully, he selects a single, simple key, works it out of the ring. Resigned, Will holds out his hand. Palm-up, waiting.

The key falls silently into his grasp, but Will hears its impact against his skin like a thunderclap. It's a key to Will's front door.

"Be safe, Will," Hannibal says, and then he's gone.

Will doesn't move for long minutes, after that. When he does, he closes his fingers around the key, slowly. Squeezes it in his fist until its teeth leave angry impressions. His entire hand is tingling, still alight with lingering sensation where Hannibal clasped it in his own. He's never regretted touching a person more than this. He doubts he ever will again.

Through the swimming haze of his own tears, he watches himself unfurl his fist, reveal his palm, splay his fingers wide. He'd been hoping that the feeling of his touch would revert, knowing what he knows now. That Hannibal's skin against his own would be unbearable, a sensory invasion that calls him to claw at his hand until it can be scraped away.

The phantom weight pressed to his palm is warm, strong, comforting. Just like Hannibal's hands have always been. Nothing has changed.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

kind of a shorter chapter today, but i hope yall enjoy it!!!

There is a dull burn eating Will alive. It does not engulf him. It does not glut, or gulp, it does not swallow. No, the chosen penance for his sins is a slow, almost gentle thing. It leaves no mark but leaves him desperate for relief, like Chinese water torture.

A terrible thing, to want.

He makes a point out of ignoring it, at first. Putting his head down and stubbornly carrying on as if he isn't being hollowed out from within. He crawls from his bed like he's rising from his grave, the sillage of Hannibal's scent clinging to the sheets no matter how often he washes them. He forces down food that tastes of nothing and coffee that tastes inexplicably different than it did before, like the Ripper chose to sneak in and replace the contents of Will's cupboards. He lectures on cruelty and feels bile rise in response where it hadn't until now.

Will does not miss Hannibal.

Not the real Hannibal, anyway. Whatever longing he might harbor is solely for the *idea* of him— that beautiful trick of the light that made itself at home in the gaps of Will's foundations, patched the crooked boards of him and left him more secure against the elements. Will mourns that light.

He imagines that to be the true source of his agony, the fuel to that directionless inferno in his veins. How can he grieve the idea of something? More than anything, Will hates Hannibal for his hand in this. For creating that perfect delusion, for taking it away, for making him feel so lost in the wake of it. No one has ever taught him how to feel in these circumstances, he's grasping at straws.

To make matters worse, his turmoil is not without an audience.

"How are you feeling?"

Will doesn't lift his head from where it's being smothered in his hands, his elbows braced atop his desk. "How does it look?" he deadpans.

He hears Beverly grunt slightly, feels a weight settle at his side as she hops onto his desk. "You're not still sick, are you?" she asks, and he can almost see her reach out to place a hand on his shoulder, stopping herself halfway and letting it fall lamely back to her side. "I tried to tell you to take some time off."

“I’m fine,” he bites. It comes out sharper than he’d intended, primed to a razor’s edge by a potent cocktail of exhaustion, scorn, and good old fashioned stress.

Of course the nightmares didn’t leave after he kicked Hannibal to the curb. That would be too easy. God forbid his life should become less tumultuous without a fucking serial killer sleeping in his bed. No more pearls, at least, though he’s almost grown nostalgic for them now that he’s become acquainted with their replacements.

What he experienced last night can only be described as a fantasy of bodily revolt. Bones tearing through his skin, expelling themselves. His once carefully guarded organs turning desperate in their pursuit of open air, fighting their way onto the sand at Will’s feet. Toward the end his eyes had leapt from their sockets, and Will watched from the shore as his body dismantled itself until it lay in a gorey pile, seemingly at peace.

Will scrubs at his face, trying to force some semblance of life into it as he looks up at Bev. “Sorry. I’m— I’m fine,” he repeats, more gently. He sits back in his chair with a slight groan, gazing despairingly at the high ceiling of his classroom. “I’m just… tired. I haven’t been sleeping lately, so I don’t really have the energy to cook, so I don’t eat right, which makes me *more tired… you see where I’m going with this.”*

She nods sympathetically, and Will feels a wave of pity emanate from her as she takes in a breath.

“I’ve uh, heard through the grapevine. About you and Hannibal.”

Will fights the urge to hide his face again.

“...You okay?”

He nods, though it’s a jagged, unconvincing motion. “Yeah,” he lies. It’s not as if he could actually discuss it with her, even if he did feel up for bearing his soul between lectures. “Yeah, I’m uh… I’m good. I mean it was— it had to happen, you know.”

Beverly’s eyes burn the flesh of his face, but he stubbornly refuses to look her way.

“Alana went to see him, a couple days ago,” she says. In his periphery, Will can see her kicking her feet idly back and forth where they dangle from the desk. “Swung by his office to ask him about a patient. She told me that he was a wreck.”

Will bites his tongue, arms crossed against his chest. He wants to be disinterested. He wants to shrug, to roll his eyes. He wants, badly, to not want.

“Did she?” he asks. Quietly, as if by accident.

Beverly chuckles. “As much of a wreck as he can be, I mean. You know. His pocket square wasn’t perfectly folded at a forty-five degree angle, he had a single wrinkle in his pants. There was a suggestion of stubble, you get the picture.”

Will’s not fond of how that information settles in his head. There’s no shortage of mean-spirited vindication, a cruel joy in knowing that while Will might be going through hell right

now, at least Hannibal is fairing horribly with him. It's not enough to spark anything in him, though. The kindling of his passions lies wet and useless on the forest floor. Doused, by a violent storm of longing. "He'll get over it," Will says, though it isn't Bev who needs telling.

Bev drums on the surface of the desk, the band of a chunky silver ring knocking repeatedly against the wood. She seems to weigh her next words for a while before speaking them.

"...You guys were really good together," she says, almost shyly. She looks tensed to flee, braced for Will to snap at her. "I mean, I know it's hard to know for sure with that kind of thing, but... from the outside, it seemed like you were good."

Will deflates at that, sinking further into his chair with a long, weary sigh. She's right, of course. The two of them had been good together. Wonderful, even. The months he'd spent with Hannibal were the best of his life. But what is he meant to tell her? That all of it was a lie? That the man he loved was a bunch of smoke and mirrors, and the actual Hannibal Lecter was essentially a total stranger? That it hurts like hell and there's no end in sight?

"It was more complicated up close," he mutters. It's all he can think to say.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

> wakes up in a cold sweat on christmas morning and realized i forgot to post this yestderday because christmas was happening. oops

It's been ten days since Will's revelation. He sits alone at his small table, nursing a glass of whiskey. It's dark, not just outside the house but inside, too. He stares into the deepest shadows of his kitchen, searching for something unknown. It's as if he's convinced himself that if he strains his eyes enough, peers deeply enough into the empty corners of himself, then something will emerge. Something that will make it all make sense.

The darkness is a monumental relief, after having his head split apart by cruel sun and harsh flourescents all day. His senses have completely blown, the pressure of his clarity bursting his mind open like a fire hydrant. Seeing the truth in all its blinding illumination has overwhelmed him, he can't bear to see again.

Every nerve shrieks for relief, all of him tender as a great sunburn. This isn't sustainable. He's smart enough to know that, even through the buzzing haze that's settled over him. Something has to give.

Will drains the glass, sets it down with a slight groan. Exhausted, he drags his hollow body to his bed. He strips, prepares for a fitful sleep.

Hannibal's obeying his wishes, at least for now. He hasn't contacted Will even once. All of his things still haunt Will's house, unpleasant reminders that jut out from the environment like splinters.

The soft, borrowed sweater stands out against the other clothes in Will's closet, deep red against muted greens and blues. It's well-loved, but no worse for wear aside from some stretching in the sleeves. Will tends to tug on the cuffs in moments of anxiety. It's always been his favorite thing of Hannibal's, stolen from him so many times that it's essentially Will's now. Will isn't even sure if Hannibal would want it back, at this point. He observes it for a long, bitter moment, and then he sighs in defeat.

It's pathetic and he knows it, but the sheer power of his own tiredness wins out over any shame he might have. He nearly passed out in the middle of a quiz today, he can't go back to work running on fumes from *another* sleepless night.

The red fabric encircles Will like an embrace, warm and comforting. Will feels a rush of relief as soon as it's on, already anticipating how rested he'll be in the morning. He settles into bed, arms wrapped tightly around himself beneath the covers, shuts his eyes—

Will blinks.

“If you’re planning to kill me then I think I’d rather just get it over with.”

One of the shadows in Will’s living room shifts, rising from the darkness. How the dogs didn’t notice him sneaking in, Will can’t say.

“I’m not here to kill you, Agent Graham,” the shadow says. He takes another step and Will can just make out the slope of a nose, the shape of an arm against the moonlight. “If all I wanted was to kill you, why would I have gone to so much trouble to contact you?”

Will reaches out— slowly, not wanting to startle his guest— and pulls the chain of his bedside lamp. The room fills with just enough warm light for Will to see the other man’s face. It’s an unfamiliar one, framed by overlarge ears and a close cropped haircut. The stranger stares at him. There’s something almost feverish in his eyes, a twinkling brightness ordinarily reserved for the incandescently happy.

“You’re the one who killed Kurt Abercrombie,” Will infers. “The one who wanted to tip me off about the Ripper.”

The false Ripper’s lip curls into a sneer at the mention of Officer Abercrombie’s demise. “The police are all idiots,” he spits. Then he takes another step toward Will’s bed, his expression rapidly changing once more to one of awe. “Not you, of course. You’re the only one who can see.”

Will narrows his eyes. “See what?” he asks.

His guest barks out a laugh. “The truth!” he says, gesturing with his hands. “Everyone else, they’re blind! Not me, though. Not us. We have our eyes open, we see things as they are. Right?”

Tentatively, Will nods. He sizes the other man up, as much as he can in the lamplight. He’s slight, wiry. Stronger than he looks at a glance. Faster, too, Will imagines. Doesn’t look like he has a gun, but that doesn’t mean he isn’t a threat. “That’s why you could see the Ripper,” Will says. “You can see things people can’t. True things.”

He nods, emphatically. “I call myself Bartimaeus, now. The blind, given sight.”

Bartimaeus doesn’t stop advancing, encroaching on Will by the second. “I don’t blame you, you know. For not seeing… *him.”* The disgust that overcomes his face at the mention of Hannibal is a powerful thing, twisting his features. “I-It wasn’t your fault. You would have seen, I know you would have. You were blinded, that’s all. He took your sight away, I had to give it back to you.”

Will tenses where he sits in the bed, bracing himself as much as he can without making Bartimaeus nervous. “How virtuous of you.”

Bartimaeus grins. There’s a hollowness in his eyes, Will’s close enough to see it now. A crazed vacancy, like he hasn’t slept in weeks and has begun to confuse reality for a dream.

“You’re upset,” he notes. Closer, closer. “I understand that. It can be painful, looking into the light after being in the dark for so long. But I needed to do it, Agent Graham. I needed to show you his face. It was for your own good— You see that, I know you do.”

He keeps his eyes on the false Ripper, but in the back of his mind he’s cataloging the space. Front door just past his bed, back door through the kitchen. Gutting knife on his fly-tying table, rifle in the living room corner, hunting knife in the top drawer of his nightstand. Dogs… must be outside? He strains his ears, can just make out scratches and a few faint whines from the back door. Did Bartimaeus let them out back without Will noticing?

“Now that your vision has been cleared, we can get rid of him,” Bartimaeus says, reaching out with one seeking arm. The tip of his middle finger just brushes the back of Will’s hand. “Together—“

Will darts to his right, seizing the lamp on his nightstand by its neck. Snarling, he brings it crashing over Bartimaeus’ head. There’s a brilliant, final flash of light as the lamp’s bulb bursts against the false Ripper’s skull, then a moment later it dissipates with a tiny cloud of mercury vapor in its wake. The sudden impact of the lamp’s metal base sends Bartimaeus staggering, and Will leaps for his opening.

He yanks open his nightstand’s drawer, grabs the handle of his favorite hunting knife. With a strength unknown to him— some once-dormant product of desperation— he shoves his intruder against the nearest wall. Bartimaeus’ body crashes against Will’s bedroom window, not hard enough to break through but his skull carves a web of deep cracks into the pane.

“Agent Graham,” Bartimaeus splutters, his hands rising to fight Will off. It’s a weak effort, his limbs still clumsy and dazed from the consecutive blows to his head. “Will, wait, please!”

The hunting knife opens with a distinctive *snick,* its shape familiar in his hand. Will sets his jaw, and thrusts.

He catches rib on his way to Bartimaeus’ heart, a scraping resistance that Will can feel in the roots of his teeth. Bartimaeus sucks in a wet gasp, still struggling against Will’s assault. Will tightens his grip, quickly turning slick with blood. He presses harder, determined for a reason he can’t let himself think about that he’s going to *break through* rather than stab again.

“Please,” Bartimaeus wheezes again, hands clutching, clawing at Will’s arms.

“Please.”

The blade pierces through, the rib cracking with a gratifying crunch beneath the metal, the sheer force Will puts behind it. From there it plunges into the heart almost effortlessly. Bartimaeus spasms, coughs a small spatter of blood onto Will’s sweater. It gets lost in the red fabric, but Will can feel its warmth, its moisture. He looks Bartimaeus in the eyes. Just for a moment, just long enough to watch the light leave them. And then he lets go.

His intruder’s body hits the ground in a heap, its final position so visibly uncomfortable that it makes Will’s joints ache. The back of his hand still crawls unpleasantly, a tiny dot of revulsion where Bartimaeus had been.

Will observes the body, the hollow, vacant vessel of him, and does not feel regret. He hadn't regretted Hobbs, either, but he'd always told himself that was because of Abigail. Because he'd saved her. He spends a moment trying to tell himself that this is no different, that he'd saved himself, tonight. He knows it's not true, though. Bartimaeus didn't want to kill *him,* he just wanted to kill—

There is no moment that he decides to pick up the phone, no spark of certainty when he presses the green button beside his contact name. The phone rings once, its tone so loud in the silence of the house that it feels indecent, like sneezing in a cathedral.

It doesn't have a chance to ring a second time.

"Hello, Will."

Hannibal's voice sounds strange where it meets him through the speaker. Low, velvet smooth, but it's missing something. The signature warmth that Will has become a bit too accustomed to, the airy confidence that usually clings to Hannibal like a fragrance. He sounds chilled, guarded. Unsure.

Will swallows, opens his mouth. He tries to search for the right thing to say, but it refuses to surface.

"I need you to come over," he blurts.

Hannibal hesitates for a beat too long. "It's late," he notes, as if that makes any difference. "You should be sleeping, no?"

Will bites his tongue. He's fishing. Probably waiting for Will to say something like 'I miss you' before he gives in. Will isn't convinced by the performance, he's already said 'yes' in every way that matters.

"I'm serious, Hannibal. How fast can you get down here?"

They hang together, suspended in the resulting quiet. Will tries not to think about how comforting it is, to have even Hannibal's silence at his side. Another shadow, standing with him in the dark.

Hannibal sighs. It crackles over the line. "...I'm on my way."

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

yay its finally done! it only took like... 3 years for me to finish this series hehehe

thanks so much to everyone who came along for the ride!

It takes less time than it should, for Hannibal to come knocking. Maybe he was speeding. Maybe he knows a shortcut that Will doesn't. Maybe he was in the middle of killing someone himself, when Will called.

Will doesn't do much, during the wait. He lets the dogs inside, shuts them away upstairs before they can nose at the body still lying in his bedroom. Bartimaeus' blood is seeping into the floorboards. There will likely be a stain. He'll have to go shopping for a rug, in the morning. He pours himself a drink, knocks it back. Just to take the edge off. Pulls on some sweatpants to preserve at least a measure of his dignity.

Still, he must do these things more slowly than he realizes, because he has no time to pace or process before he sees the Bentley's headlights floating up the drive.

Hannibal looks cautiously pleased, when Will opens the door. Hopeful. It makes something in Will twinge painfully.

"Good evening."

Will sighs. Exhaustion or relief, maybe a little of each. "Thanks for coming down here so fast."

Just that easily, Hannibal's expression softens into one of deep concern. "Are you alright, darling? You look troubled."

Will could say the same for Hannibal. As Beverly had said, the signs of his suffering are more subtle than Will's, but on such a carefully maintained appearance they stand out like blood on snow. The marble statue of his facade is crumbling, piece by piece. It aches to look at him.

In lieu of a reply, Will holds the front door wide open, steps aside. Before he enters, Hannibal's nostrils flair. A sudden ferocity comes over him, one that Will's only seen in glimpses until now. Is this what he's always been, beneath the skin?

The scent of blood on the air spurs him into action, and he darts into the house like a hunting dog. He doesn't have to go far to find the reason for Will's call.

Hannibal observes Bartimaeus' body with a clinical dispassion, cocking his head to the side in idle curiosity. "And who do we have here?" he asks.

Will heaves out a sigh, moves to stand at Hannibal's side. "Your copycat paid me a visit" he replies. Bartimaeus' eyes are still open, staring in permanent horror at the space beneath Will's bed. "He seemed to think that since I wasn't in bed with the Ripper anymore, I'd be looking for a replacement."

Hannibal turns to look at him, his eyes wide and alert and *incensed.* "Did he—"

"Relax. He barely touched me." It fills him with a sick pleasure, though. Seeing Hannibal so fiercely protective over him, even when the danger lies dead at his feet.

"You killed him before had the chance," Hannibal infers. He's smiling, trying not to be obvious in how he smiles. Proud, but hesitant to show it.

Will nods.

Hannibal crouches in front of the body, observing the damage. Will knows that Hannibal will feel it, if he stares at his back. He shoves his hands in the pockets of his sweatpants, makes himself feign interest in the far wall.

"So what do we do with him?" Will asks at length. "Chop him up, bury him in the woods?"

"You called me to help you hide the body."

Will shrugs. "I told you I needed you here."

Hannibal narrows his eyes at him. Looks him up and down. His eyes catch on Will's torso, and Will feels a heat burst over the back of his neck as he realizes what he's wearing. Hannibal's sweater, the same fucking sweater he'd been wearing when they made up from their last fight. A subtle smugness that he was lacking when he arrived comes over Hannibal's features. The corner of his mouth quirks upward, just for a second. A smirk.

"What?" Will snaps.

He gives Will a look that says something to the effect of *'Come, now.'* "You know how to hide a body better than most," he observes.

Will scowls. What's he implying? "No amount of study can replace first-hand experience," he bites.

Hannibal stands, takes a leisurely step in Will's direction. "You could have called Jack, you know," he notes, and Will knows that he isn't talking about Bartimaeus.

He's right, of course. Will's been asking himself why he hasn't gone to Jack yet almost constantly since he found Hannibal out. Tried to pin it on fear, or uncertainty, or pure spite. After all, he should be turning Hannibal in. Hell, he *should* have let Bartimaeus kill the Ripper himself and be done with it. Hannibal would have deserved it.

“I didn’t want to call Jack,” Will says. Foolishly, he lets Hannibal advance, entering his space.

“No?”

Will had been livid, in the wake of his revelation. Heartbroken that Hannibal had betrayed him, lied to his face, fabricated a love that wasn’t even real.

But he’d begged Will not to leave him, in his own way. As much as Hannibal Lecter can bear to beg. He wore the evidence of emotional turmoil too convincingly for Will to call it a front. He hadn’t fled, even with the threat that Will might call the FBI looming over his head at every moment. He hadn’t hesitated to come here, even in the dead of night. Even when he had nothing to gain from it anymore.

Will licks his lips. “Some things are best dealt with privately, don’t you think?” Tugging the cuffs of his sweater, Will takes a step of his own, standing nearly chest-to-chest with the Chesapeake Ripper. “Maybe we could just… keep this between us. Just you and I.”

Every inch of Will’s skin seems to buzz like a live wire when Hannibal’s hands cup either side of his face. Hannibal’s kiss is desperate, fevered, starved. The sensation feels stronger than ever before, somehow. Truer. It’s overwhelming in the best possible way, and Will falls into it readily.

Will’s hand lifts to cover one of Hannibal’s own, pressing his skin as close as it can get. His touch trails up Hannibal’s arm, finds his shoulder, yanks him nearer. Hannibal kisses him again, again, his lips part eagerly and Will takes the invitation with a hunger that edges on obscene. He counts Hannibal’s teeth, catalogs the texture of his tongue against his own, memorizes the feeling of the soft flesh just inside Hannibal’s lips.

Hannibal is restless in his passion. His hands thread through Will’s curls, slip down his neck, caress his spine. Every touch bursts over Will’s skin, shooting up his nervous system and tickling the pleasure centers of his brain.

He clutches harsh fistfuls of Hannibal’s shirt, crushes their mouths together as he pushes both their bodies toward the bed. Hannibal stumbles backward on the first step, then gets the memo and lets Will walk him where he wants to go. Hannibal only gets a chance to breathe when Will shoves him onto the mattress, and Will takes a generous half-second to look down at him. His eyes are lidded, his lips kiss-swollen and parted just so. He’s panting, just a little. Excited. Aroused.

Will pounces. He crashes into Hannibal, immediately reconnecting their mouths as soon as he settles over the other man’s broad, sturdy frame. There’s a gracelessness in how Will consumes him, their teeth clacking when he surges as close as he can get. Hannibal’s arms weave themselves around Will’s back, crushes him as close as he can.

“I’m gonna fucking kill you,” Will half-moans when he can stand to tear his mouth away, ducking his head to mouth at Hannibal’s throat. He can feel Hannibal’s pulse, thrumming against his tongue when he licks a long stripe along heated skin.

“I know,” Hannibal gasps.

Will returns to his lips, kisses him for so long that it nearly suffocates both of them. Hannibal is still dazed when Will starts attacking the buttons of his shirt.

“You lied to me.” His hands shake with the thrill, his fingers clumsy over the buttons. Hannibal’s hands move to his own chest, as if to help, but Will grits his teeth and rips the shirt open before he can. A few buttons clatter to the wooden floor with a satisfying sound that resonates in his ears. “You tricked me, you betrayed my trust.” The thick hair on Hannibal’s chest is soft and familiar beneath his hands, the powerful muscles resting beneath tender fat like a barely-concealed threat.

Will seizes him by the back of his head, fingers twisting in his hair. He drags Hannibal up into a bruising, wet kiss, and Hannibal moans openly into his mouth.

“This doesn’t mean I forgive you,” he mutters, teeth sinking hard into Hannibal’s lip.

“I know,” Hannibal repeats, fingers ducking beneath the hem of his sweater. Will shivers when his fingers ghost along the curve of his waist. “I know. I’m so sorry, mylimasis.”

Will’s lashes flutter, sitting back on his knees for the moment it takes for Hannibal to fully divest himself of his now-ruined shirt. Impatient, fevered, he rocks his hips. Hannibal is hard, and Will’s breath hitches when his own erection grinds against it. “Say it again,” he groans.

Hannibal blinks, staring up at him in the dark. His pupils are blown, like a house cat that’s spotted a bug nearby. His mouth hangs open for a startled beat, then weakly he stutters out “...I’m sorry, Will.”

The sound that rises from his throat is more animal than it should be. A growl, let slip from his jaws. Hannibal reacts in kind, his upper lip twitching into a fierce snarl. It’s an action Will’s seen dozens of times, but painted in a fresh, crazed light. Will’s hands find Hannibal’s belt buckle, his fingers overeager as they yank it free. *“Again.”*

Hannibal’s touch runs downward, trailing along the small of his back until it slips inside Will’s boxers. He gropes at Will’s ass, kneading it in his strong, warm hands. “I’m sorry,” he whispers, and the reverence in his tone has it sounding dangerously similar to dirty talk. Hannibal rises from the bed, stalls Will’s attempts to undress him by catching him in a heated, sensual kiss. “I’m sorry,” he murmurs against Will’s mouth, then again and again as he nips and suckles at Will’s throat. “I’m sorry.”

The bed creaks when Will hops from it, shoving his pants and boxers down while Hannibal makes quick work of his own clothing. From the corner of his vision, he catches a glimpse of the corpse still lying on his bedroom floor. Is this who he’s become, now? Has loving the Ripper made him the sort of person who can do this and still stomach himself?

Will reaches for hem of his sweater, and Hannibal places a hand on his wrist. “No,” he says, making no secret of how he devours the sight of it wrapped around Will’s torso. “Leave it on.”

Moisture floods his mouth, physical evidence of the hunger he feels. He aches with it, every inch of him starved for how undeniably *right* it feels to be touched by Hannibal and Hannibal alone. Will watches him lie back, laid bare for him in more ways than one. Hannibal, his Ripper, his monster.

For one heated, heavy moment, they simply stare at one another, both waiting to see what the other will do. And then Will is on him.

Hannibal threads a hand in Will's curls as he settles over the other man's lap, the other forcing itself between them to wrap around the base of Will's cock. Will gasps, fucking into his hand as Hannibal starts to stroke. He's got touching Will down to a science by now, but it's especially devastating during sex. Hannibal knows exactly how to handle his cock, all of the ways to make him mewl and moan and *'Yes, God yes, like that,'* until Will's brain has been reduced to a calm, empty abyss. It should be embarrassing, really, how easily Will falls to pieces under his touch. He can't bring himself to resent it, all the same. No one else has ever made him feel the way Hannibal does. With a rush of heat to his gut, Will thinks that no one else ever could.

The drawer of Will's nightstand is still partially open where he'd left it, and Will surges up the bed to fish inside. Unable to help himself, Hannibal caresses the meat of Will's thighs while Will pulls a small bottle of lube from where it's been stashed away. It's nearly empty, he notes, the product of Will's own loneliness in Hannibal's wake.

Hannibal's grip tightens when he sees the bottle, wordless anticipation nearly enough to bruise. Will kisses him hard, forces the lube into his hand.

"Fuck me," he growls.

The look on Hannibal's face goes straight to his cock. It's awestruck, lustful, famished. Hannibal's always been a patient lover— always looked out for Will's comfort every step of the way, careful to keep Will forever suspended *just* on the right side of overwhelmed. It's something that Will is endlessly grateful for, and he shows it. He's aware, after all, that his sensory issues can make for some less-than-ideal circumstances in the bedroom.

They'd had to stick to mouths and hands for longer than either of them would've liked, when their relationship first started proper. It took some serious work to get past that point, but eventually Will was able to fuck Hannibal without having a meltdown. Will burns with the memory of the first time, the hot, tight clutch of him and the sinful sounds he'd made. And Hannibal's told him at least a hundred times that he's satisfied with bottoming— likes it, even. But Will didn't get where he is today without getting pretty damn good at reading people.

Hannibal wants to be inside him. Desperately.

Still, it's been a bit too much for Will to handle every time they've attempted it, so he's not surprised when Hannibal finds the presence of mind to whisper a husky "Are you sure?"

He's not sure. Sure that he *wants* this, fuck yes, but not entirely sure that his senses are up to the task. Will's mind is still whirling from the rush of killing Bartimaeus, his heart pinballing

off his ribs to have Hannibal back in his arms again, his nerves humming with every sensation that greets him. None of that stops him from grabbing Hannibal's hand, guiding it forcefully to his ass, and saying "I'm in fucking control, Hannibal. Give it to me, *now."*

It punches the air from his lungs when Hannibal flips them, his back finding the mattress in the blink of an eye. Hannibal, forever a victim to being spoiled for choice, seems determined to enjoy everything that Will has to offer. His tongue makes quick work of invading Will's mouth, slipping behind his front teeth and playing over the sensitive ridges there. It makes Will squirm, makes his cock throb and his hands clutch at Hannibal's shoulders. He almost hates that Hannibal's discovered so many of his weaknesses, hates that he can manipulate Will in such simple, devastating ways.

Hannibal nearly drops the lube in his urgency, applying an amount that Will clocks as overgenerous onto his hand. Will hisses when Hannibal brings his hand back to Will's cock, his touch gliding over his length in slow, slick strokes. He works Will over for a few blissful moments, lulling him into a less demanding state with a much more familiar breed of pleasure before giving him what he's asking for. A part of Will wants to snap his teeth about it, to tell Hannibal to stop playing with his food and get on with it. It's hard to muster any real irritation like this, though. Will's hips lift from the mattress, chasing how Hannibal thumbs at the head, squeezes him just so. He plucks at Will's threads, one by one, with the kind of ease that only comes from dedicated study.

Will gasps, choking on air when Hannibal hitches up the sweater and hot, plush lips move to mouth at his nipples. Hannibal laps at the sensitive bud, sucks it into his mouth, rolls it under the tip of his tongue. Will's so caught up in the sensations that he almost doesn't notice Hannibal's touch drifting lower.

One of Hannibal's fingers starts teasing at his hole, circling it with gentle, coaxing pressure. Will bites his lip, he cards his fingers into Hannibal's hair, holding him in place where he's still mouthing at Will's nipple.

His eyes snap shut when Hannibal slips inside. Even the single digit feels like a monumental breach, somehow. A final invasion, Hannibal carving a space for himself in the only way he has left. Unless he decides to finally cut Will open someday, his half-present mind supplies, and a sick piece of Will that's only just come to life squirms with pleasure at the thought.

Hannibal keeps him thoroughly distracted as he explores Will's hole, coaxing a litany of hitching gasps from him with teeth and lips while his finger pumps slowly in and out. They've made it this far before, on a handful of occasions, but Will still throws his arm across his face in response to the sensations. Blocking off the senses he doesn't need always makes it easier, the darkening of his vision a great relief to his raw-rubbed mind.

He's patient with Will. Delicate, even. He always is. Unbidden, Will envisions the Ripper's victims. The cruel detachment that Hannibal maintains from his prey, a dispassionate sort of disgust that can't even manage to bubble over into actual hatred. Will's tasted it himself on his journeys through the Ripper's mind, a first-and-a-half hand experience of what it is to see a human being suffer and feel almost less than nothing.

How decadent, then, to be handled like this by the Ripper's own two hands. How obscene his own gluttony must be, that Will finds himself greedy for more, more, *"More."*

Hannibal kisses the demand from him, pulls away only as much as the act requires, finds the bottle once again. Will's nerves hum with anticipation, his mind searching for every tiny sound as his eyes stay resolutely shut. He hears Hannibal's breaths, labored even before he's begun in earnest. He's been longing for Will, since they've been apart. Starved for him. Will can almost taste how his mouth waters for him.

The seconds stretch painfully. The cap comes undone with a soft click, slick skin meets skin, Hannibal hisses through his teeth. Will takes in a great breath through his nose, holds it for a few seconds, blows it out, slowly.

The head of Hannibal's cock eases its way into Will's hole. Will gasps, catching his lower lip between his teeth. It isn't painful, Hannibal has been far too thorough for that. He's braced for overwhelm, though. Ready for the sensation of *too much* to crash painfully over his senses. A shallow thrust, another inch. "Breathe, mylimasis," Hannibal entreats, and Will realizes that he's holding his breath. He nods, forcing in a shaky lungful. Deeper, gently.

"Are you alright?"

Another nod, too quick to look natural.

The arm draped across Will's eyes gets moved, then. Hannibal takes him by the hand. He twines their fingers together, presses their joined hands into the mattress near Will's pillow. Tenderly, Hannibal squeezes. His hips have gone still. He waits.

Will squeezes back.

The silence edges on eerie, as Hannibal finds his rhythm. Every small sound between them feels monumental in the emptiness of the night. Will's bed creaks beneath their weight. Hannibal's hips roll in deep, slow grinds. Will can't stop letting out sharp, hitching gasps with every thrust. His legs weave their way around Hannibal's hips. Sweat pools in the hollows of his knees. Hannibal's panting breath is hot and heavy against the skin of his face.

Will reaches up with the hand not pinned to the mattress, finds Hannibal's nape by feel alone. The kiss he drags the other man into is wet, loose, filthy. Hannibal's cock fills him so perfectly, it's like there's no room in him for anything else.

Maybe that's been the problem all along. Too much empty space in his head, too many dark corners for monsters to occupy. Hannibal doesn't shy away from those corners, though. He makes himself at home in the places Will's afraid to explore on his own, makes them seem non-threatening. Welcoming, even. Hannibal takes up all of the negative space, doesn't let anything else get into Will's head.

Just the two of them.

"I love you," Will mutters into Hannibal's mouth, passing the words between them around a blur of needy kisses. "God, I love you."

Hannibal crushes the air from him, for a moment. His body collapses against Will's, heated skin squished to skin as his thrusts turn quicker, more desperate. Will tips his head back, Hannibal's mouth latching hungrily onto his throat as he lets out a high, broken moan. He's close, Hannibal's cock dragging over his prostate with every thrust. His movements are rougher, now. Harsh. Will clutches at his shoulder blade.

"I love you, Will," Hannibal rasps, licking at his pulse. It's sick, he knows it, but having the Ripper so eagerly taste his flesh makes a shudder roll down Will's spine. He kisses an artery, suckles at soft tissue. "More than you could ever know."

Will tightens his legs around Hannibal's waist, squeezes his hand so hard that it hurts. His breaths rush wildly, pleasure pooling molten in his core. His cock leaks onto both of their bodies, Hannibal pressed so close to him that his stomach drags along Will's length.

He's whimpering into their next kiss, writhing as his orgasm nips at his heels. Hannibal doesn't falter, fucking into him *just right* while Will falls to pieces in his arms. Will catches Hannibal's lower lip between his teeth, keens into the other man's mouth. He bites down. *Hard.*

The sudden burst of iron in his mouth is what shoves Will over the edge. Hannibal's blood is hot against his lips, sharp and forbidden on his tongue. Will tightens around Hannibal's cock, breath going still in his throat as he comes. His release spills between their bodies, his hips bucking uncontrollably. Will's heel digs into the small of the other man's back, low groans of Hannibal's name pouring from his bloodstained lips.

It's an unpleasant sensation, being filled with Hannibal's cum. He's too mesmerized to protest beyond a slight grimace. Hannibal hunches over him like a beast, rutting his spend into Will like he means to claim him. He grunts his pleasure, fingers digging into the meat of Will's thigh.

Hannibal laps at the inside of Will's mouth as he shakes through the aftershocks. He lets out something like a growl, tasting his own blood on Will's tongue. It satisfies something in him, Will can feel it.

Will's never felt so attuned to another person as he does in this moment, never felt so comfortable inside of someone else's head. Hannibal's forehead falls to rest against his own, their panting breaths mingle in a way that shouldn't be so comfortable.

Slowly, their hands disentangle. Will's fingers ache, his hand sweaty and sore from the sustained pressure. It feels… wrong, now. Empty, without Hannibal holding it down to earth.

Something frantic leaps from him when Hannibal starts to pull away. A strangled sound rises from his chest, his hands clutching at the other man's arms. "Where are you going?" he asks, his eyes finally blinking open. "Stay."

The first thing he sees is Hannibal's eyes, narrowed with adoration as he smiles down at Will. "I'm not going anywhere," he soothes, and kisses the tip of Will's nose. Heat floods to Will's face in response, sheepish in the face of his own vulnerability. Contrary to his words,

Hannibal gently extracts himself from Will's hold. The air is unseasonably cold in his absence, at odds with how his sweat makes the sweater cling to his back.

Hannibal stands with a grunt, the hard planes of him carved in the moonlight. "But I think you'll agree that we should dispose of your guest, before we retire for the night."

Will blinks. His eyes flick to the side, instantly finding the corpse still lying on his floor. Less than five meters away from where they'd fucked. He drags his hand down his face, groaning. "Right. Of course. I just—" He cuts himself off with a sigh. Hannibal presents him with a damp cloth, politely inspects the body as Will makes a half-hearted effort at cleaning away cum and lube. Softer, awkwardly, he says "I just don't want to sleep without you."

It doesn't escape his notice that Hannibal doesn't look at him when he asks "Even knowing what you know now?"

Will sighs, hopeless. "I meant what I said, Hannibal. I love you. And I… I believe that it's still real, what we have."

Hannibal finally turns to him, at that. His eyes feel enormous in the darkness, wide and hesitantly hopeful. In spite of himself, in spite of morality or common sense, Will smiles. "I let you in, Han. I let you get close to the real me. And I know that I shouldn't, but I think I'd like to know the real you, too."

After a moment of stunned silence Hannibal goes to him, takes Will's face in his hands, pulls him into a lingering, ardent kiss. Will reaches up and covers Hannibal's hands with his own. Holds him there.

"I've never wanted to show my true self to anyone else, my love" Hannibal whispers when they part, and Will's heart stutters. "No one but you."

Will leans into Hannibal's touch, savoring the feeling of the other man's skin against his own. "No," he agrees. "No one but you."

End Notes

thanks so much to arnuts, lexicons, rose tyler, kmac, and all of my raindrops for the support! also thanks to everyone who read the first 2 parts of this series and expressed interest in a continuation <3

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!